

## **“STAND FIRM, YE BOYS FROM MAINE”**

### **Testimony of Brigadier General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain**



**“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”  
1 Corinthians 16:13**

#### **Introduction**

A fascinating leader to emerge from the Ken Burns series *The Civil War*<sup>1</sup> was Brigadier General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain<sup>2</sup> 1828-1914, an academic and theologian from Bowdoin College, Maine. Aged 34, he was appointed to command the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Volunteer Infantry in 1862 and served with distinction at Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Petersburg and Five Forks. General Ulysses S. Grant<sup>3</sup>, commander of the Union armies, selected Chamberlain to receive the surrender of the Southern army at Appomattox Court House on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1865. Here Chamberlain made the unforgettable and honourable gesture of a parade ground salute to the defeated enemy, returned by General John B. Gordon, the Confederate commander, who remembered Chamberlain as “*one of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal Army.*” Chamberlain was awarded the Medal of Honour in 1893 for service at Gettysburg. He was diligent and thereby served his nation loyally, as Christian men should.

**“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men”** Proverbs 22:29.

Chamberlain’s biography *In the Hands of Providence* by Alice Rains Trulock focuses on his war service and subsequent career but Trulock reveals that Chamberlain was a committed Christian with a resilient faith that sustained him through the worst of the Civil War. Chamberlain’s life and testimony show that God’s promise to Isaiah still holds good today.

**“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”** Isaiah 43:2.

### **“Stand firm, ye boys from Maine”**

Chamberlain led the vital and victorious defence of the Round Tops at Gettysburg on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1863. The battle raged throughout the glaring heat of the July afternoon “*with exhaustion and terrible losses...taking a great toll on both sides,*” Trulock pp 146-147. One of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine’s men, Private later Rev. Theodore Gerrish<sup>4</sup>, later testified of the conflict “*...not once in a century are men permitted to bear such responsibilities for freedom and justice, for God and humanity, as are now placed upon you...Stand firm, ye boys from Maine.*” See graphic. That was really Chamberlain’s testimony and the Christian has a like exhortation. **“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”** 1 Corinthians 16:13.

### **“Safety is of the LORD”**

Chamberlain, disdainful of personal danger, stood conspicuously on top of a large boulder so that he could oversee the action. Trulock writes “*A Confederate from the Fifteenth Alabama...drew bead on Chamberlain...but something - a strange feeling - caused him to stop. Puzzled and impatient with himself, he tried again to squeeze the trigger but could not. Finally, he gave it up, and this perilous moment in Chamberlain’s life passed, all unknown to him.*” As Solomon observed **“The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD”** Proverbs 21:31. That is an encouragement for today’s believer.

### **“Jesus Christ is my all-sufficient savior. I go to him”**

Chamberlain was severely wounded in the battle of Petersburg, Virginia, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1864, Trulock, pp 214-215. He was taken to the division hospital, already choked with wounded. A private of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania lay on an operating table awaiting amputation of his leg. “*He heard Chamberlain ask to be laid to one side, saying that he was all right and they should take care of his boys.*” Instead, the surgeons gave priority to Chamberlain but they thought he would not survive. The bullet “*had torn through his whole body from right thigh to left hip, severing blood vessels, nicking the urethra and bladder, and crushing bone before it stopped.*” Nevertheless, the surgeons worked on Chamberlain all night, though stopping at one point because of his terrible pain. He urged them to continue but in the cold light of dawn, believing death was near, he pencilled a short note to his wife and children:

*“My darling wife I am lying mortally wounded the doctors think but my mind & heart are at peace Jesus Christ is my all-sufficient savior. I go to him. God bless & keep & comfort you, precious one, you have been a precious wife to me. To know & love you makes life & death beautiful. Cherish the darlings & give my love to all the dear ones. Do not grieve too much for me. We shall all soon meet Live for the children Give my dearest love to Father, mother & Sally and John Oh how happy to feel yourself forgiven God bless you evermore precious, precious one Ever yours Lawrence”* It was not, however, **“the day of death”** Ecclesiastes 8:8 for Chamberlain. That is God’s decision, as every believer should note.

“*Jesus Christ is my all-sufficient savior*” is nevertheless the essential testimony for every individual, as Peter declared. **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** Acts 4:12.

### **“I have finished my course”**

After the war, Chamberlain pursued a long and distinguished career in public life and was elected State Governor for Maine four times. Though still plagued by his wound, he lived to the age of 85. His final testimony was as Paul’s and as the Christian’s should be. **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”** 2 Timothy 4:7.

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#### References

<sup>1</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Civil\\_War\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Civil_War_%28TV_series%29)

<sup>2</sup> Web references for Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua\\_Chamberlain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Chamberlain), [www.cafepress.com/+joshua-lawrence-chamberlain+gifts](http://www.cafepress.com/+joshua-lawrence-chamberlain+gifts), [july1863.homestead.com/daytwo.html](http://july1863.homestead.com/daytwo.html)

<sup>3</sup> [dragon1st.tripod.com/cw/files/jlc1.html](http://dragon1st.tripod.com/cw/files/jlc1.html)

<sup>4</sup> *Army Life A Private’s Reminiscences of The Civil War* by Rev. Theodore Gerrish, late a member of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Vols., [archive.org/details/armylifeprivates00gerr](http://archive.org/details/armylifeprivates00gerr), p 108